Recruitment from minority communities

3129. SHRI AMIR ALAM KHAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is contemplating to incrrease the number of recruits from minority communities in the Army;

(b) if so, the details thereof, and the number of personnel recruited so far;

(c) whether any target has been fixed in this regard during the current year; and

(d) what is the rate of achievement of these targets?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) to (d) Armed Forces have a secular and apolitical character. Recruitment to the Forces is based on merit and is open to every citizen of the country, without any discrimination on the basis of their caste, creed, religion or region. All the personnel from all communities and regions work together without any distinction on the basis of caste, creed or religion.

Defects in BPVs

3130. SHRIMATISHOBH ANA BHARTIA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Army has procured Bullet Proof Vehicles (BPVs) for its officers who are carrying out counter-terrorism operations in J&K and NE as reported in the media;

(b) if so, whether the Army Commanders are still not assured of safe and swift movement in their new Bullet Proof Vehicles;

(c) if so, whether CAG has found several flaws in the BPVs;

(d) if so, whether the Northern command and Eastern command have also pointed out defects in the BPVs; and

(e) if so, the corrective steps taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a)A contract for procurement of 200 Light Bullet Proof Vehicles was signed on 29.7.2005. Also, a contract for 9 Bullet Proof Vehicles was signed in February 2007.

(b) A problem with these bullet proof vehicles is the lack of adequate pulling power in mountainous terrain, for which a new engine is being trial evaluated. However, Commanders at all levels are confident of the protection and mobility provided by these vehicles. The vehicles are being effectively used in counter terrorism in Operational areas of Jammu and Kashmir and North East.

(c) The C&AG in Para 2.1 of their Report No. CA 4 of 2008 (Defence Services) have, *inter-.alia,* noted that the vehicles procured in 2005 have lower pulling power, unsuitable for cross country movement, overheating of tyres and losing advantage of bullet proof glass. In respect of the 2nd contract of February 2007, the C&AG has observed that procurement of these vehicles was effectively on a single vendor basis, even as there was an indication by Ordnance Factory, Medak (as per inputs received by the Integrated Financial Adviser) for supply of the vehicles at a lower price.